



# Bernardston Reconnaissance Report

Connecticut River Valley Reconnaissance Survey

Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program



JUNE 2009

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation  
Franklin Regional Council of Governments  
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

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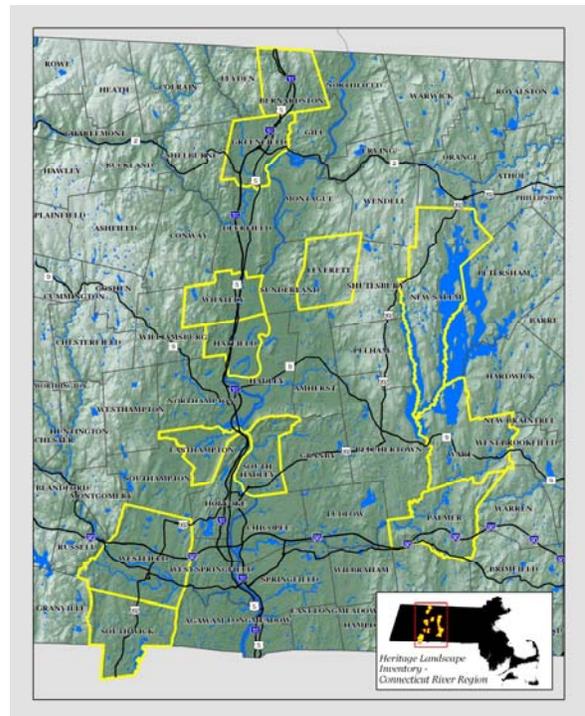
## INTRODUCTION

Heritage landscapes are special places created by human interaction with the natural environment that help define the character of a community and reflect its past. They are dynamic and evolving, reflect the history of a community and provide a sense of place. They show the natural ecology that influenced land use patterns and often have scenic qualities. This wealth of landscapes is central to each community's character, yet heritage landscapes are vulnerable and ever changing. For this reason it is important to take the first step toward their preservation by identifying those landscapes that are particularly valued by the community – a favorite local farm, a distinctive neighborhood or mill village, a unique natural feature or an important river corridor.

To this end, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and its regional partners, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), have collaborated to bring the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program to twelve communities in the Connecticut River Valley region of Massachusetts. The goals of the program are to help communities identify a wide range of landscape resources, particularly those that are significant and unprotected, and to provide communities with strategies for preserving heritage landscapes.

The communities within the Connecticut River Valley region of Massachusetts are diverse in their settlement patterns and economic histories.

What they hold in common is a foundation built on agriculture that was carried out in communities traversed by a series of major waterways and tributaries, from the Connecticut River to the Deerfield, Sawmill, Green, Millers, Quaboag, Swift, Mill and Ware Rivers. This region contains significant cultural and historic resources and uncommon natural beauty. For some of the communities, industry developed alongside agriculture, so that today the heritage landscapes reflect both agrarian and industrial pasts while providing recreational and educational opportunities. From scenic town commons and natural areas, to civic buildings and burial grounds, the heritage landscapes within the region collectively tell the story of their varied and often complex history.



Connecticut River Valley Heritage Landscape Inventory project area

## **Methodology**

The methodology for the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program was developed in a pilot project conducted in southeast Massachusetts. It is outlined in the DCR publication *Reading the Land*, which has provided guidance for the program since its inception. In summary, each community organized a heritage landscape identification meeting during which residents and town officials identified and prioritized the natural and cultural landscapes within town that embody the community's unique character. This meeting was followed by a fieldwork session led by the project team, including the local project coordinator and staff of FRCOG or PVPC, accompanied by interested community members. During the fieldwork session the Priority Heritage Landscapes were assessed and opportunities for preservation were explored and discussed. The final product for each community is an individualized Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report. This report outlines the community's landscape history, describes the Priority Heritage Landscapes along with associated opportunities, issues, and recommendations, and concludes with implementation strategies.

## **PART I: HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY**

### **LOCAL HISTORY**

Bernardston is located in the north-central section of western Massachusetts. It encompasses twenty-three square miles, and to the north is Vermont with the Massachusetts towns of Northfield to the east, Gill and Greenfield to the south, and Leyden to the west. Larger commercial centers near Bernardston are Brattleboro, 14 miles to the north; Greenfield, 9 miles to the south; Northampton, 27 miles to the south; and Amherst, 27 miles to the southeast. Major transportation routes that pass through town include the north-south Interstate 91 (connecting Vermont and New Hampshire with the City of Greenfield and points south in New England) and State Highway Routes 5 and 10. These two routes share the same section of roadway south of the center of Town. They then split, with Route 5 running north to the Vermont State Line and Route 10 continuing east to Northfield. Bernardston also has active rail lines for the transportation of freight.

Bernardston's rich history is interwoven with its unique location and topography. This small hill town is located in the northernmost portion of Franklin County and is dominated by the rugged Green Mountains. The elevation of this mountain range varies considerably in Bernardston—ranging from 650 feet to 1,245 feet above sea level. Bernardston has large intact forest ranges

that extend beyond town boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Forested land in Town decreased by 5% in Bernardston between 1971 and 1999<sup>2</sup>, and could be at risk for further loss due to increased residential development in the future.

Running north-south in the middle of the town between the Green Mountains is the Fall River Valley, containing the Fall River. This valley contains relatively flat, fertile agricultural land. Farmland has decreased between 1971 and 1999 by 13%, representing the loss of 275 acres of agricultural land.<sup>3</sup> The Falls River is the primary waterway for Bernardston. It flows in a southerly direction and eventually enters into the Connecticut River just below Turners Falls in Montague. The Fall River provides the drinking water for the town's wells, which supply Bernardston's Central Village. Most of Bernardston lies within both the Deerfield River and Connecticut River Watersheds. The protection of the excellent water quality in Town has been identified as a community priority.

Bernardston was established as a land grant by the state legislature in 1736 for veterans of the Turners Falls Fight with the Native Americans in 1675. It was originally named Fall Town, for which the Fall River eventually was named as well. The town did not become "Bernardston" until it was incorporated in 1762, named for the first Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Sir Francis Bernard, who governed from 1760 to 1769.

Because of its location far from major commercial centers and its steep mountainous terrain, Bernardston's history has been greatly shaped by its natural resources and setting. It was slow to grow during the Colonial period due to its isolation and exposure to potential Native American attacks and did not have a significant population until the 1760s when the French and Indian War ended. There were four fortified garrison houses or forts in town where inhabitants sought refuge during Native American raids. In 1760, the colonial community consisted of approximately 230 individuals. By 1775, the population had more than doubled to approximately 500 residents. The steep terrain also limited the extent to which agriculture and development was practical.

Development was originally primarily clustered around the fort and meetinghouse at Huckle Hill. In the early colonial history of the town, settlement patterns in Bernardston shifted from the Huckle Hill area to the Fall River Valley as the French and Indian War began to subside. As the area became more peaceful, the meetinghouse was relocated in 1761 down to the valley and development began to spread throughout the Fall River Valley. (The meetinghouse was

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<sup>1</sup> *Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan*; p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

relocated again in 1791). Development also became more focused in the Fall River Valley due to the presence of the river, as its power could be harnessed for many tasks. As a result, many mills and small manufacturing establishments were located along the Fall River. Bernardston is reported to have been one of the first towns in New England to have begun commercial production of maple syrup, beginning around 1765. The population grew very rapidly between 1776 and 1790, but then began to taper off.

By the mid-1800's, the development patterns in Bernardston had once again shifted—this time to focus on the current Bernardston Center. This focus began after the meetinghouse was relocated for a third time in 1825 to Bernardston Center at the Fall River mill site on Northfield Road. By this time, smaller population nodes had already been established along Greenfield Road (Route 5) at Hales Crossing and on River Street at the mill site on the river. A farming village in North Bernardston had also been established around a tavern located at Shattuck Brook in the Fall River Valley. The Town's population reached an early peak in 1840 of 992 persons. A civic center was created in Bernardston Center with the establishment of an academy in 1857 (the Powers Institute) and the construction of a library in 1862 (Cushman Library) around the town common (Cushman Park).

An east-west rail line was constructed by the Connecticut River Railroad in 1847 to run through the town. This line is still active today as a freight line. The railroad was made possible with the construction of a monumental stone four-arched viaduct across the Fall River, which still exists today just south of Bernardston Center. Interestingly, the arrival of the railroad coincided with a decrease in the Town's population as many farmers left New England for the more favorable soils in the midwest.

Bernardston saw a large increase in industry during this period—the town had at least six saw mills, two grist mills, the iron works, the Temple and Green scythe snathe<sup>4</sup> Manufactory, and N.S. Cutler's shoe factory. However, despite these mills and the presence of the railroad, Bernardston remained a small, rural town with agriculture the predominant source of income. In addition to corn and rye crops, barley also became a significant crop in town. The two towns of Bernardston and Northfield produced 86% of the county hops acreage in 1855.<sup>5</sup> Dairy production also began to play an increasingly important role in the town's agriculture in the mid-1800s.

Within the first half of the 1900s, there were no new industries and little residential construction in Bernardston. However the town's population grew by 20%—making it one of the few towns

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<sup>4</sup> A snathe is an attachment to a scythe (long blade used for sowing or reaping) with a handle

<sup>5</sup> *MHC Bernardston Reconnaissance Survey*, p. 8.

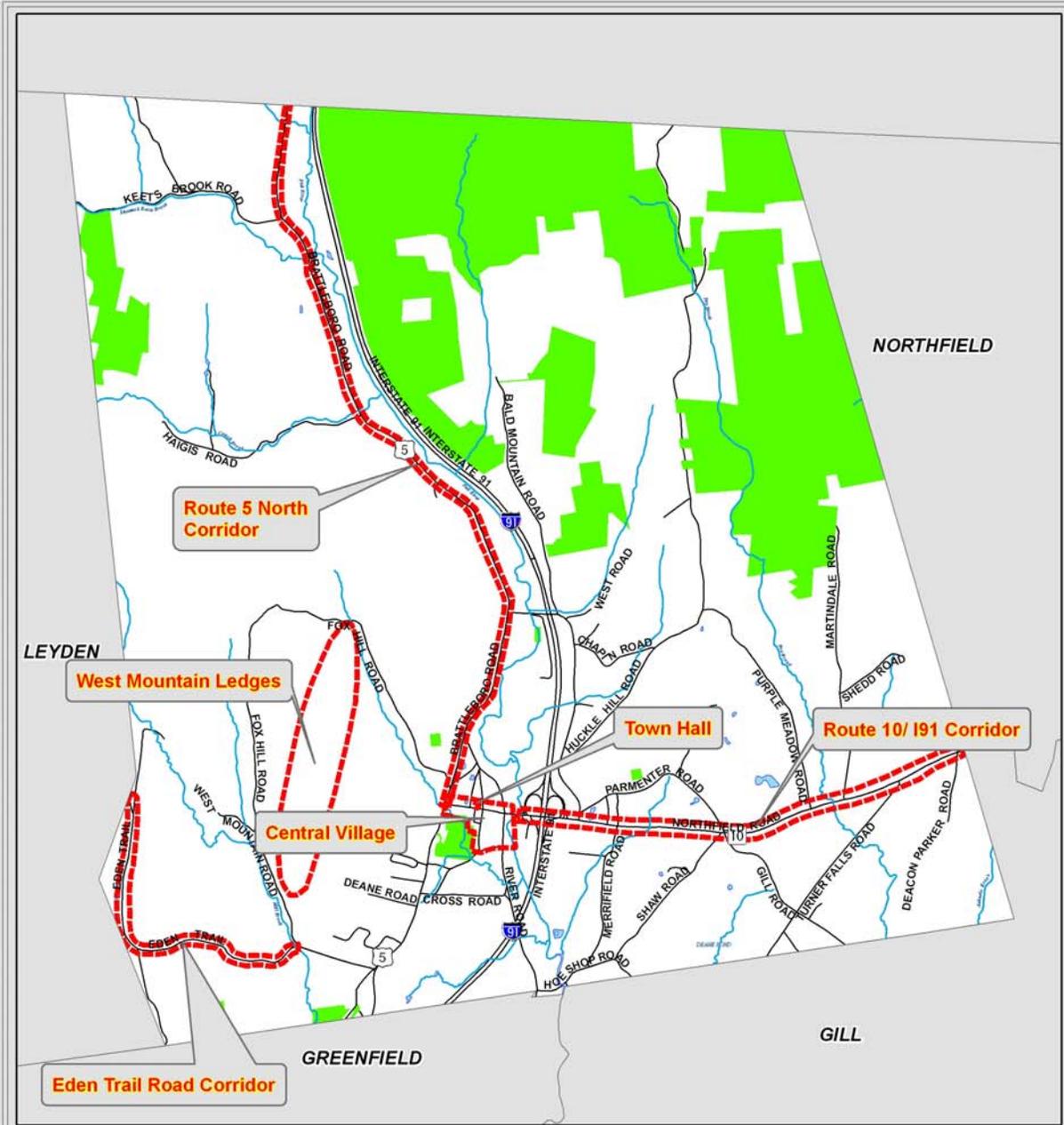
in Franklin County to experience a net gain in population during this time. Much of this growth occurred in Bernardston Center. The original meetinghouse of 1739 still exists in the Center today, after having been moved several times. The town center retains many of its early 19<sup>th</sup> century civic buildings along with residential homes in the Italianate, Greek Revival, and Gothic styles. During the early 1900s, dairy farming became the principal agricultural industry and was reported to be the chief means of livelihood for Bernardston families. Dairy farming continued as the primary activity in the Fall River Valley through the early 20th century with elaborate period barns in North Bernardston. Agriculture also influenced the development of tourist activities along Route 5, as well as a period hotel and gas stations near the Town Center to accommodate visitors.

The 1992 Franklin County Rural Historic Landscape Preservation Plan identified a number of significant landscapes in Bernardston, each associated with a particular category of importance. Many of these landscapes are tied to the Town's agricultural history and remain largely intact. They include: Eden Trail Road (agricultural), Route 10 (agricultural), the Perry Farm on Route 5 (agricultural), Route 5/10 (as an early transportation route), Bernardston Center, and Cushman Park (community development).

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that Bernardston had a population of 2,155 people, making it the 7<sup>th</sup> most populated out of the 26 towns in Franklin County. According to this data, 140 Bernardston residents worked within the Town, or 12 %. Valley Masonry and Construction is the biggest employer in Town, employing 40 workers, followed by Country Oil and Plumbing, Crumpin Fox Golf Club, the Town of Bernardston, and the Bernardston Elementary School. The highest percentage of Bernardston workers (38.1 %) worked in nearby Greenfield, which is the most populated town and the largest employment center in Franklin County.

## **PRIORITY HERITAGE LANDSCAPES**

In the public identification meeting, participants identified a broad range of 34 landscapes within Town that define the heritage of the community. These heritage landscapes provide a cross section of the types of landscapes that contributed to the historical development of the town and together tell the story of Bernardston's past. Meeting attendees then voted to identify 6 Priority Heritage Landscapes for the focus of this project. These Priority Heritage Landscapes are: **the Central Village Area; the Town Hall; the Route 5 North Corridor; the Eden Trail Corridor; the West Mountain Ledges; and the Route 10/ Interstate 91 Corridor.**



- Permanently Protected Open Space
- Heritage Landscape



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## Town of Bernardston

Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
 Franklin County



Map Sources:  
 Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
 Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
 and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.  
 Funding:  
 The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
 Department of Conservation Resources

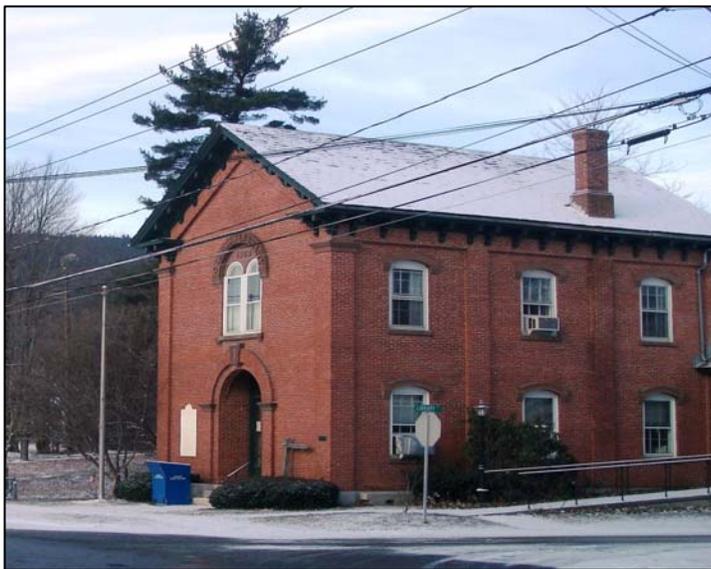
## Central Village Area

Bernardston's Central Village Area is primarily comprised of properties located on Church Street from the Fall River on the east to Cushman Park and Route 10 on the west. The area extends south to High Street and the Arch Bridge over the Fall River on River Street. Key properties included in this Civic/Institutional Priority Landscape include the Cushman Library, Town Hall (discussed in following section),



Central Village Area on Church Street (photo by Annette Mackin Wadleigh)

churches (including the Congregational Unitarian Church, United Church of Bernardston and what was previously a Baptist church), the Powers Institute, Cushman Park, and the Arch Bridge. Also included in the area are the Center Cemetery and several commercial properties (including the Country Corner Store, a gas station and the former Streeter's Store). According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Reconnaissance Survey, "Of note in the town are the survival of the first meetinghouse (1739) and the excellent state of preservation of the village center. A range of 18th and 19th century houses and cottages with all major institutional buildings and a few commercial buildings stand at the town center."<sup>6</sup> Almost all of Bernardston's institutional buildings date from the Early Industrial Period (1830-1870).



Cushman Library

### *Cushman Library*

The Cushman Library is located at 28 Church Street and is an Italianate brick structure built in 1862 by Pierre Belhumeur. The Library is a two-story brick structure with bracketed eaves, pilasters and roundhead windows set in brownstone surrounds. The second floor (which used to be called Sanderson Hall), has served as a public meeting hall and space for community events and entertainment. The property is included in the Powers Institute National Register Historic District.

<sup>6</sup> MHC Bernardston Reconnaissance Survey, p. 11.

## *Churches*



Congregational Unitarian Church

There are a number of churches in the Central Village that help to shape the character of the area (and the name of its main road). The steeples of these churches are visible from the distance as you approach the Town from the east on Route 10/Church Street. This scenic vista is particularly stunning in the fall with the West Mountain Ledges in full color in the background. The Congregational Unitarian Church and the United Church are located on Church Street and both currently have active congregations. The Baptist Church, now dissolved, is located on Depot Street next to the Bernardston Cemetery and is currently for sale. Each of these churches has a unique history.

The Congregational Unitarian Church is the most historically significant church in Bernardston, as it was the Town's first meetinghouse, originally constructed by early settlers on Huckle Hill in 1739. It was moved three times over the years; first to a location a mile down Huckle Hill in 1761, then in 1791 to the confluence of three roads in the Fall River Valley, and finally in 1825 it was moved to its present location in the Central Village Area.<sup>7</sup> The meetinghouse's current appearance dates from a remodeling in 1825 in the Greek Revival style. The building features a shallow projecting double entrance with full pediment and domed two-stage square belfry that was added at that time, including a bell. The steeple was recently restored at a cost of \$90,000 and the historic bell is still there, although it is now enclosed. Worship services are currently held on the lower floor and the upstairs hall is used for special events. The Congregational Unitarian Church is the only individual property in Bernardston that has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since March of 1993.

## *Powers Institute*

The Powers Institute was built in 1857 as a private academy and later became Bernardston's public high school, graduating its final class in 1957. It is one of the town's most fully developed Italianate buildings, with a cross-gabled plan, bracketed eaves, and a tall square belvedere on the top that once had a widow's walk, positioned to offer a fine view of the surrounding area.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.bernardstonunitarian.org/church\\_history\\_page.html](http://www.bernardstonunitarian.org/church_history_page.html)



*Powers Institute and Silver Pond*

The Powers Institute National Register Historic District was created in March of 1993, a small district consisting of the Powers Institute, the Cushman Library, the Fire Station, Cushman Park, and Cushman Hall. (Cushman Hall, which provided affordable housing, was demolished due to structural deficiency in 2005.) Since 2002, the Powers Institute has been protected by a Preservation Restriction held by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to protect its architectural and historical integrity.

In 2001, the Institute underwent a \$1 million renovation with funds from MHC and the Community Development Block Grant program. As a result the lower floor has been transformed into the community's Senior Center, managed by the Council on Aging, which offers classes to seniors. Meals are also offered on the first floor of the building. The upper floor, accessible by an elevator, houses the Town's Historical Society Museum, including memorabilia from the school in a room set up as a schoolhouse, farm and household tools, textiles, and a Luman Nelson collection of small animals and birds. The museum is open to the public from May to October because there is no heat in that part of the building in the winter months.



Historical Society Museum with Powers Institute sign

### *Cushman Park*

Cushman Park is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of Church and South Streets. The park consists of nearly 2 ½ acres and was originally constructed in 1863, when the focus of the Town moved from the Fall River Valley to the current Central Village Area. The park includes a ball field, pedestrian walkways, and an area dedicated to Veterans' Memorials. The



park is a central community gathering space where residents attend events including Old Home Day and Bernardston's popular Scarecrow Contest in the fall. It is included in the Powers Institute National Historic District.

### *Cushman Park*

### *Arch Bridge*

The Four Arch Stone Railroad Bridge crosses over the Fall River just south of the town center near the intersection of River and High Streets. The bridge was built in 1846 by Theodore Judah and is the only industrial structure in Bernardston known to survive from the Early Industrial Period (1830-1870), according to the 1982 MHC Bernardston Reconnaissance Survey Report. That report identified the Arch Bridge, the adjacent sawmill, and the Barber grist mill as a potential National Register Historic District. At that time, a turbine in the sawmill still powered an overhead cable to the first mill, possibly the only remaining example of a cable-driven mill in New England.



Four Arch Stone Railroad Bridge

### *Opportunities:*

- The Central Village Area is a well preserved town center encompassing all of the Town's major institutional buildings (Town Hall, Cushman Library, Fire Department), the first meetinghouse (now the Congregational Unitarian Church), the town common (Cushman Park), and a few commercial buildings (including a general store and a gas station), as well as historic residences.
- The Central Village Area includes within its boundaries a small National Register Historic District centered around the Powers Institute, which has recently been renovated into an active Senior Center providing a gathering place for senior citizens to enjoy meals, recreation programs, and community interaction. The building includes the Town's Historical Society Museum on the second floor, which is maintained by a dedicated group of volunteers.
- Cushman Park provides a community gathering place for community events as well as opportunities for recreation right in the center of Town. Recent efforts by the Kiwanis Club and others in town have improved the park with the addition of benches, walkways and flowers. There is interest by some town residents in constructing a bandstand and parking on the site where Cushman Hall once stood, to the east of Cushman Park. In addition, the 27-acre Darwin Scott Memorial Wetland owned by the State Division of Fisheries and Wildlife abuts the park to the south, providing expanded opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing.
- The Arch Bridge over the Falls River and its surrounding former mills provide a window into the Town's industrial past.
- The Fall River flows through the Central Village Area on its eastern boundary, though its course was changed dramatically by the construction of Interstate 91 in the late 1950s. The Fall River remains the largest waterway in Bernardston.

### *Issues:*

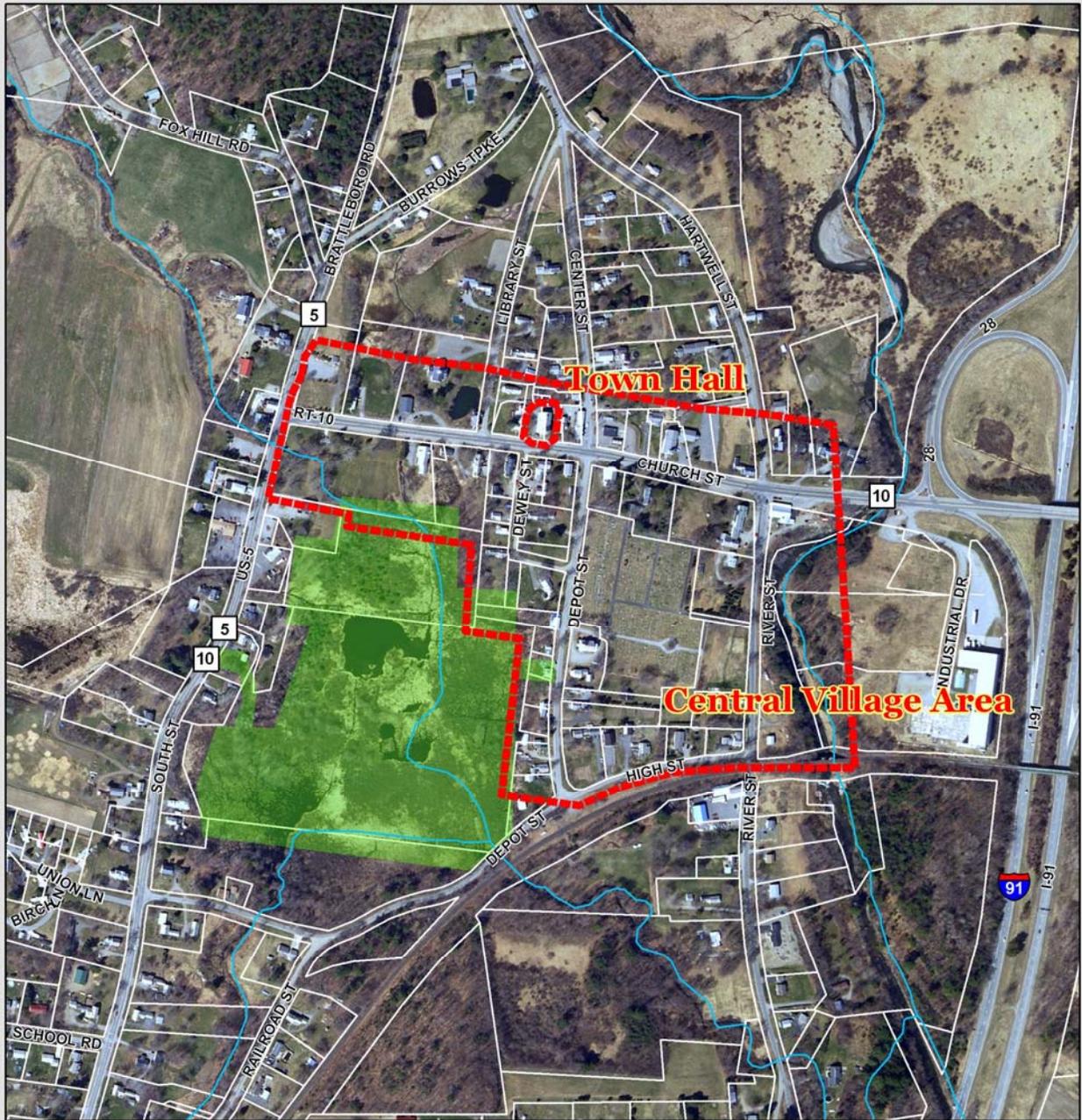
- The Powers Institute National Register Historic District is limited, including just 3 buildings and the park. (It also included Cushman Hall which was demolished in 2005). There are many significant historical properties in the surrounding Central Village Area that are not included within this district.
- The National District is honorary in nature and does not provide any protective measures for the district.
- The beauty of the Central Village Area is marred by the predominance of overhead utility wires, as can be seen in photos of the area.
- The Central Village Area has no public sewer infrastructure and septic systems serving the Town Hall and Cushman Library are close to failing, with no land available for expansion or replacement.

- It has been 20 years since major renovations, including a new roof, have been made to the Town Hall. Exterior paint is peeling and the upstairs Assembly Hall cannot be used due to lack of handicap accessibility. (See the next section for a full discussion of the issues surrounding the Assembly Hall.)
- The second floor of the Powers Institute that houses the Town's Historical Society Museum has no heat, limiting its public use to the warmer months between May and October.
- Cushman Park lacks necessary amenities to be fully utilized as a venue for family recreation and community-wide events and has building restrictions on the property associated with the original donation of the land to the town.
- There are few sidewalks in the Central Village Area that link to the walkways in the Park to provide a safe environment for pedestrians, especially seniors.
- The Arch Bridge and the former mills surrounding it could be further recognized for their importance to the Town's industrial history
- There are no opportunities for residents and visitors to take advantage of the close proximity of the Fall River to the Central Village Area.

*Recommendations:*

1. The Town should consider the expansion of the National Register Historic District for the entire Central Village Area, including all civic buildings, the park, historic homes, and the Arch Bridge and surrounding mills. If the entire Central Village Area is not deemed to be eligible for listing on the National Register, the Town might consider creation of another smaller Historic District in the Arch Bridge area, including the nearby former mills, that would highlight the significance of the area to the Town's industrial past.
2. The Town might also consider the creation of a Local Historic District (LHD) under M.G.L. Chapter 40C to provide a higher level of protection for the properties in the District than a National Register District would provide. LHDs must be approved by a 2/3 majority vote at Town Meeting and are administered by a Local Historical Commission, appointed by the Selectmen, that reviews and approves proposed changes according to the terms of the local bylaw. Another option would be to establish an Architectural Preservation District (APD) in the Central Village Area. This is a local designation that recognizes the distinctive characteristics of special areas within a community. They are less formal than LHDs in that they focus on making recommendations regarding key architectural elements and massing, scale, and setback, in an effort to preserve the overall character-defining features of the area. As in LHDs, changes are reviewed by a district commission but their recommendations are advisory in nature.

3. Grant funds could be sought from the MHC's Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) to address renovation and maintenance issues for public buildings located within an expanded district, such as the addition of heating at the Powers Institute Museum.
4. The Town should continue to closely monitor the progress of the analysis of wastewater treatment options being done as part of the Town's participation in the State's Chapter 43D expedited permitting program. The study will evaluate wastewater treatment options in areas identified as appropriate for commercial and industrial development as well as the Central Village Area and recommend possible solutions to remedy the current situation. When the analysis is complete, the Town should evaluate how any recommended solutions might benefit the Central Village Area.
5. The Town should explore opportunities to revamp Cushman Park including the need to upgrade the ball field and to maintain and improve sidewalks in Town, including the Central Village Area. One potential funding source for these recommended projects is DCR's Recreational Trails Program, which provides a variety of grants ranging from trail protection to construction projects.
6. The Town should explore the possibility of burying the overhead utility wires, an action that would greatly affect the overall aesthetics of the town center.
7. The Town could explore ways to provide access to the Fall River in the Central Village Area, possibly in the area behind the former Streeter's Store or in the area near the Arch Bridge. Activities at a new riverside park might include picnicking, fishing, hiking, etc.



	Permanently Protected Open Space
	Heritage Landscape
	Parcel Lines

## Central Village Area & Town Hall

Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts,  
Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
Franklin County




**FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**  
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Map Sources:

Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.

Funding:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
Department of Conservation Resources

## Town Hall



Bernardston Town Hall

The Bernardston Town Hall is located at 38 Church Street and was constructed in the Stick Style in 1878 by Bernhard Dirks and Frank and Gardiner Oaks. It is a well-detailed 2 ½ story building with a mansard roofed entrance porch and applied stickwork. This is the only institutional building in Bernardston that was constructed during the Late Industrial Period (1870-1915). The first floor is currently used for Town Offices

The Assembly Hall located on the second floor of the Town Hall was once used for Town Meetings, dances, sporting events, plays, and concerts. Primary access to the Hall is gained by stairs in the front entryway leading to a set of double doors. Because the Hall is not handicap accessible, it is now used

only for storage. The Hall provides seating capacity for 100 people. It features a stage with a background mural created by area school children. Historic graffiti can still be seen on the walls of the stairwells behind the stage. Major renovations to the building, including upgraded windows and a new roof, were made 20 years ago with donated funds. The Hall is in good condition though there is some evidence of water damage. The second floor also provides access to the clock tower that tops the building.

### *Opportunities:*

- The Town Hall's upstairs Assembly Hall is in good condition with only minor maintenance issues.
- This space has historically been used for civic and community events and with upgrades to make it accessible would be able to be utilized again for this important use.



Assembly Hall upstairs in Town Hall

*Issues:*

- The Assembly Hall is not handicap accessible and does not have an elevator so the second floor meeting space cannot be used for public meetings or events.
- Funding is needed to upgrade the Assembly Hall and make it handicap accessible.

*Recommendations:*

1. The Town should seek grant funds to make necessary renovations to the Town Hall to make the second-floor Assembly Hall handicap accessible. This might be accomplished with the installation of a lift on the front stairs and addition of a handicap accessible bathroom on the second floor. Potential funding sources might include the Community Development Block Grant Program and MHC's Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF).

## **Route 5 North Corridor**



Scenic Route 5 at Couch Brook looking north (photo by Annette Mackin Wadleigh)

Route 5 North from the center of Town to the Vermont border (also known as Brattleboro Road) is steeped in the agricultural history of the Town of Bernardston, and has played a role as a transportation resource throughout the Town's development. The 6-mile scenic road is noted for its pastoral views of open fields and barns and for the historic homes, taverns, and stagecoach inns that dot its length. This state highway runs through the Fall River Valley, with the Fall River running between it and Interstate 91. It is located in a floodplain and a portion of the road near the

intersection with Burke Flat Road is located in a Water Supply Protection Area for one of the Town's five water wells.

Route 5 (Brattleboro Road) dates back to the earliest history of the Town of Bernardston. It was the location of two of the four forts or garrison houses where settlers sought refuge during Native American raids in the early to mid-1700s. These were Samuel Connable's Fort (1739), which still stands on Route 5 slightly north of the junction with Couch Brook, and Major John Burke's palisaded hamlet (1739), no longer extant, located slightly above the junction of Route 5 and Burke Flat Road – the site is identified with a historical marker.

Some of the finest houses remaining from the Federal period stand on Route 5 near North Bernardston, including the Perry Farm House, built by David Ryther Jr. in 1790, and the 1789 Jonathan and Ezra Connable Tavern, an end chimney, hip-roofed structure with front and side wall entrance treatment that also features a ballroom.<sup>8</sup> This was one of three stagecoach inns located along Brattleboro Road.



Jonathan and Ezra Connable Tavern

Also located along Route 5 North are several farms with historic homes and scenic barns which contribute to the road's rural character. A number of these farms have historically produced maple syrup and other maple products, and continue production currently. Bernardston was one of the first towns in New England to produce maple products in major quantities, beginning as early as 1765. Grover's River Maple Farm on Brattleboro Road is an example of such a farm compound that is still active today. Additionally, an historic cider mill is located on Route 5 North and the Old Cemetery on Burke Flat Road is visible from the highway.



River Maple Farm

<sup>8</sup> *MHC Bernardston Reconnaissance Survey*, p. 7.

### *Opportunities:*

- The 6-mile, scenic Route 5 North is noted for its pastoral views of open fields and distinctive barns as well as for the historic homes, taverns, and stagecoach inns that dot its length.
- The open fields along Route 5 North provide multiple recreational opportunities, with private landowners permission, such as hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling.
- Farmland constitutes approximately 13% of the total acres in Bernardston, and nearly 10% of the total amount of privately owned open space with some level of protection from development.<sup>9</sup>
- There are 616 acres of farmland on Brattleboro Road (Route 5 North) that are temporarily protected under the Chapter 61A tax abatement program.<sup>10</sup>
- Route 5 North is located in a floodplain due to the close proximity of the Fall River. Further, a portion of the road near the intersection with Burke Flat Road is located in a Water Supply Protection Area for one of the Town's five water wells. This provides some measure of protection from development pressures for the farms and historic properties along the highway.
- Bernardston recently adopted a Right to Farm Bylaw to support active agriculture in Town.

### *Issues:*

- None of the properties along Route 5 North are permanently protected from development.
- None of the distinctive barns or historic homes along Route 5 North are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or otherwise protected, such as by an Architectural Preservation Restriction. Only four historic properties have been documented on Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) inventory forms.
- The farms along Route 5 North may be vulnerable to development pressures if land owners are not able to continue viable agricultural production on their property. The long-term sustainability of many small, family farms is a challenge with rising production costs and the costs associated with the maintenance of farm infrastructure and equipment.

### *Recommendations:*

1. The Bernardston Agricultural Commission should help promote Bernardston's history as the first maple syrup producers by working with local farmers on a Bernardston Maple Syrup Farm Day with tours and tastings.
2. Owners of farmland along Route 5 North could work with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) or the Franklin Land Trust to place an Agricultural

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<sup>9</sup> *Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan*; p. 54.

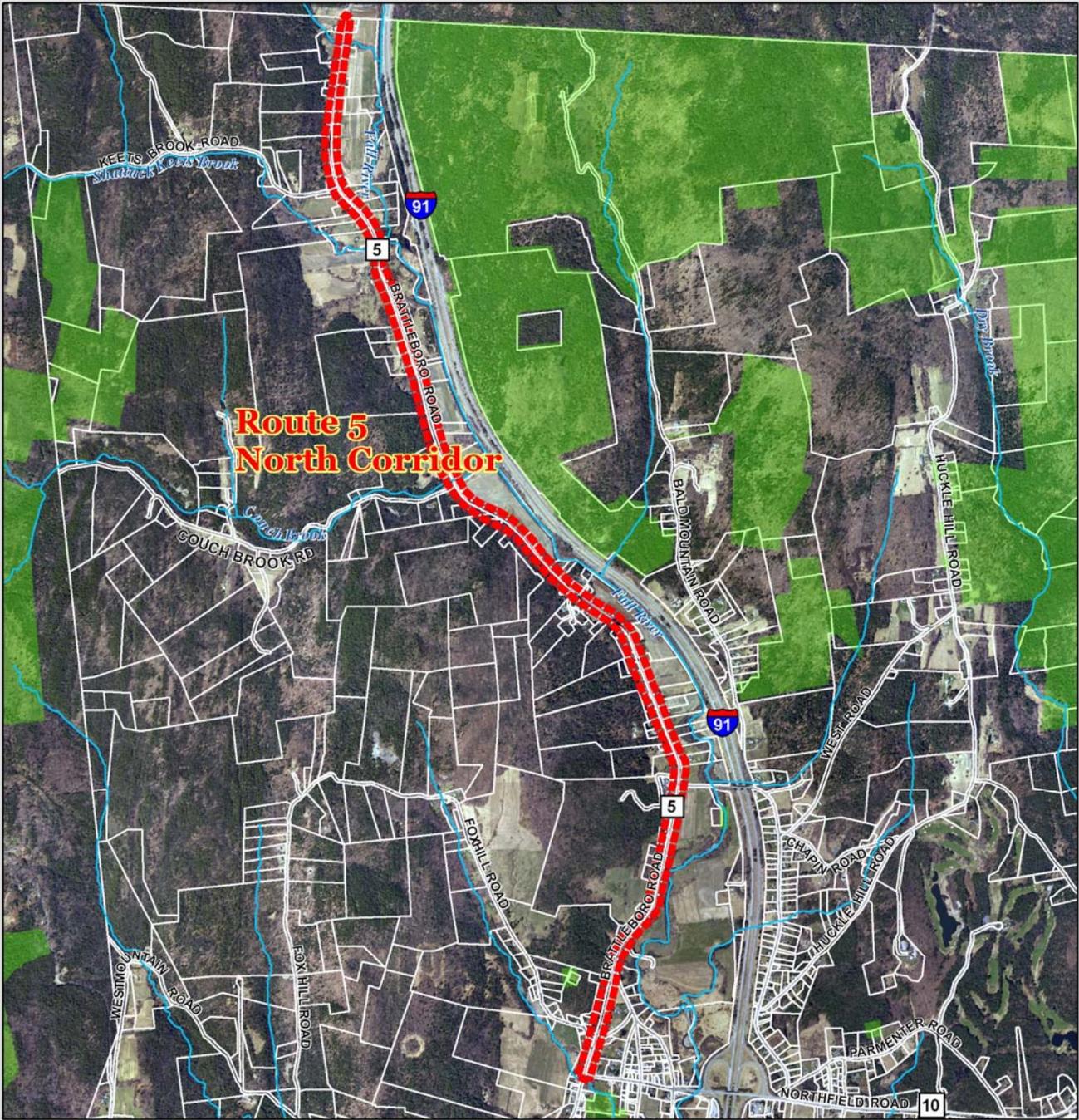
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 55.

Preservation Restriction (APR) on their properties to permanently protect the land, and help keep the land in agricultural use in the future.

3. Another program under the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources that could help preserve the working farms is the Farm Viability Enhancement Program. This program seeks to improve the economic viability and environmental integrity of participating farms through the development and implementation of farm viability plans. The program offers farmers environmental, technical and business planning assistance to expand, upgrade and modernize their existing operations. Capital for the implementation of the improvements recommended in the viability plan is available in exchange for an agricultural covenant on the farm property for a fixed term of five or ten years.
4. The town should consider developing a Chapter 61 protocol that guides the town through right-of-first-refusal options under Chapter 61. If properties within the Eden Trail Road corridor that are enrolled in the Chapter 61 program become available through a conversion of use, the town would have the option to either purchase the property or transfer their right of first refusal to a conservation organization.
5. The Town could consider adopting zoning provisions to encourage the adaptive reuse of the barns and other farm buildings along Route 5 North if the structures are no longer in agricultural use. Examples of adaptive reuse include: event space for weddings and other functions, studio space for artists or musicians, or other commercial use that is compatible with the surrounding landscape.
6. The Town should update its MHC survey sheets to ensure that all historic properties along Route 5 North are included and are correctly described in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) database. Funds for this project could be sought from the Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program, a federally funded, reimbursable, 60/40 matching grant program that supports historic preservation planning activities in communities throughout the state. Interested landowners could work with the Town and volunteers and/or college students to inventory and document the barns along Route 5 North.
7. Interested owners of historic homes and barns along Route 5 North could work with the Bernardston Historical Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission to place Historic Preservation Restrictions on their structures to help preserve their scenic and historic value.
8. The Town's Open Space Committee could work with willing landowners to develop recreational trails along Route 5 North, potentially including snowmobile, cross-country

skiing, and hiking trails. A trail might be established from Route 5 to the Old Cemetery, accessible off Burke Flat Road, which would combine scenic and historic elements.

9. The Town should consider creation of an Agricultural Protection Overlay District on Route 5 North that would require clustering of residential properties on smaller lots to preserve farmland.



	Permanently Protected Open Space
	Heritage Landscape
	Parcel Lines

## Route 5 North Corridor

Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts,  
Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
Franklin County



Town of Bernardston




**FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**  
Main Office: 413-774-3167  
425 Main Street  
Greenfield, Massachusetts 01301



Map Sources:

Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.

Funding:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
Department of Conservation Resources

## Eden Trail Road Corridor

Eden Trail Road is located in the extreme southwest corner of Bernardston, continuing off of West Mountain Road at the Mill Brook Bridge. It continues across the Town Line into Leyden. The road is dotted with farms and open fields along its 2.25-mile length, including the 100-acre Sunbrite Farm, which is a working dairy farm that is part of the Our Family Farms



Scenic vista at Sunbrite Dairy Farm on Eden Trail Road (photo by Annette Mackin Wadleigh)

milk marketing cooperative, and a sheep farm across the road. Other farms on the road include the Dyer and Adams Farms. The road is at a high elevation, providing scenic views of the mountains to the west, including the High Ledges in Shelburne.

There are 250 acres of farmland within the Eden Trail Road corridor that are temporarily protected under the Chapter 61A agricultural tax abatement program.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there are another five acres enrolled in the Chapter 61B recreation/open space program.<sup>12</sup> Some of the open fields are used as trails for snowmobiling by members of the Bernardston-Leyden-Gill Snowmobile Association based in Leyden.



Newborn lambs at sheep farm on Eden Trail Road

<sup>11</sup> *Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan*; p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 58.

### *Opportunities:*

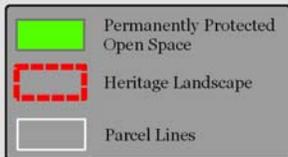
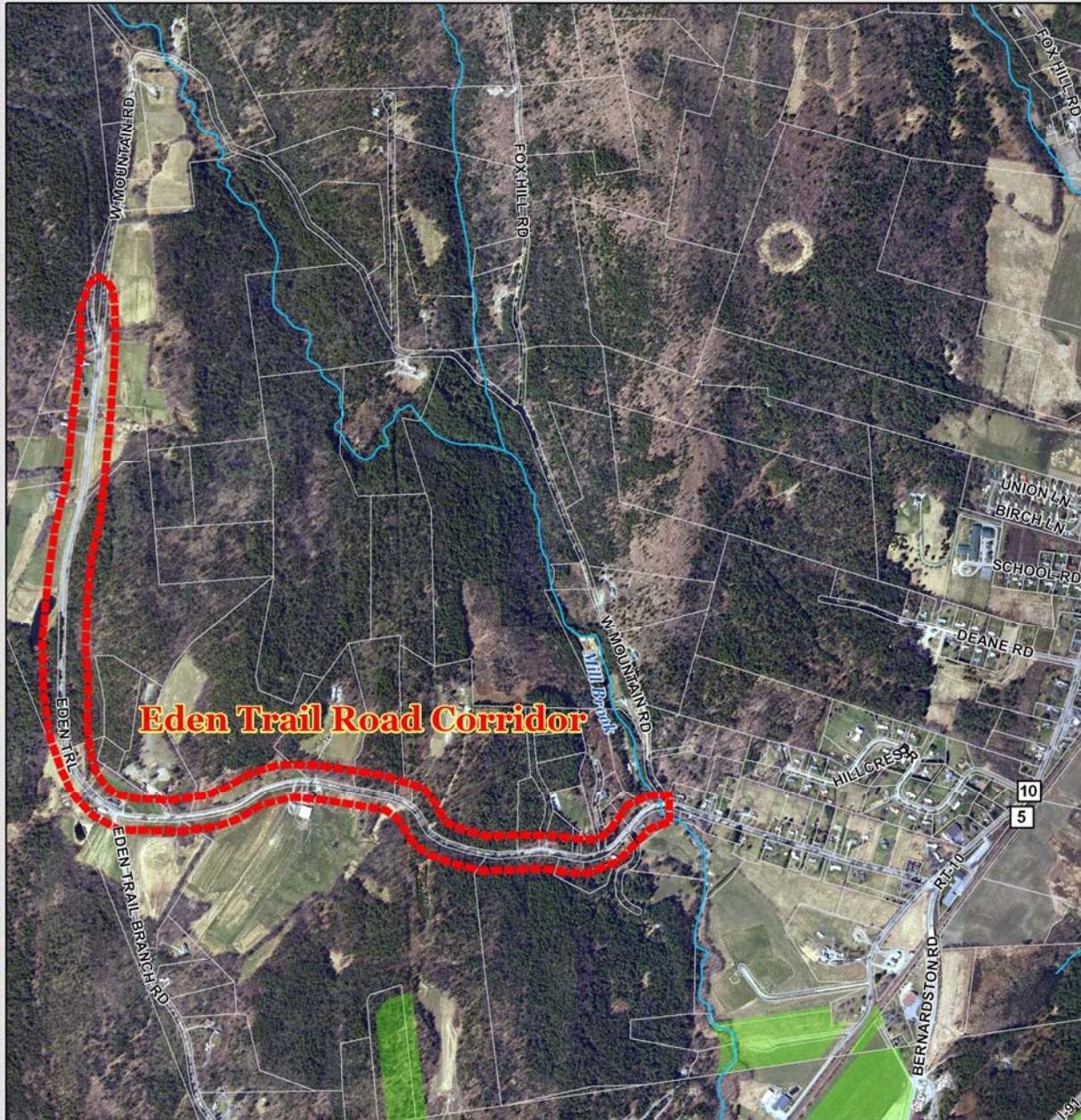
- There are over 250 temporarily protected acres of farmland and open space on Eden Trail Road.
- Working farms on Eden Trail Road contribute to the local and regional economy, provide wildlife habitat and contribute to the rural character of Bernardston. Some of these farms have been within the same family for generations.
- Eden Trail Road provides scenic views of the mountains to the west, including the High Ledges in Shelburne.
- Multiple properties on Eden Trail Road were identified as agricultural Rural Historic Landscapes worthy of preservation in the 1992 *Franklin County Rural Historic Landscape Preservation Plan*.

### *Issues:*

- None of the properties along Eden Trail Road are permanently protected from development making them vulnerable to conversion out of agricultural use.
- The farms along Eden Trail Road may be vulnerable to development pressures (especially with current high production costs) if landowners are not able to continue viable agricultural production on their property. The scenic vistas and extensive frontage available for Approval Not Required (ANR) development along Eden Trail Road may make the area particularly attractive to potential developers.

### *Recommendations:*

1. The Town should consider creating an Agricultural Protection Overlay District on Eden Trail Road that would require clustering of residential properties on smaller lots to preserve farmland.
2. Owners of farmland along Eden Trail Road could work with MDAR or the Franklin Land Trust to place an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on their properties to permanently protect the land, and help keep the land in agricultural use in the future.
3. The town should consider developing a Chapter 61 protocol that guides the town through right-of-first-refusal options under Chapter 61. If properties that are enrolled in the Chapter 61 program become available through a conversion of use, the Town would have the option to either purchase the property or transfer their right of first refusal to a conservation organization. The town may want to prioritize parcels located within the Eden Trail Road



## Eden Trail Road Corridor

Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts,  
Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
Franklin County



Map Sources:

Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.

Funding:

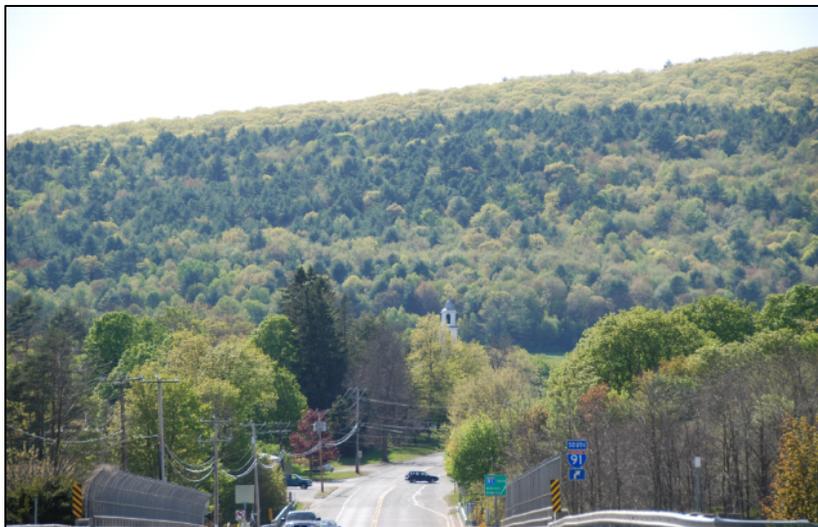
The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
Department of Conservation Resources

corridor that are enrolled in the Chapter 61 program that they might be interested in purchasing or protecting if they become available through a conversion of use.

4. The Town could protect the scenic quality of Eden Trail Road by designating it a Scenic Road under M.G.L. Chapter 40, Section 15C, which requires that a public hearing be held prior to the removal of any trees or stone walls that are within the public right of way for any type of maintenance or repair work on the scenic road.
5. If the town were to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA), this would be a potential source of funding for the required town match for a willing landowner to participate in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program
6. The Bernardston Agricultural Commission should promote the Town's Right to Farm Bylaw, particularly targeting residents in the Eden Trail corridor, to minimize conflicts between residential and agricultural uses.

### **West Mountain Ledges**

The West Mountain Ledges are located on the eastern side of West Mountain, visible from Central Village Area. The ridgeline and steep ledges of West Mountain, as seen when approaching the village center via Route 10, were identified in the Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan as one of the Town's important scenic resources.<sup>13</sup> The ledges are particularly stunning in the fall when the leaves have changed colors.



West Mountain Ledges with Unitarian Church steeple in foreground (photo by Annette Mackin Wadleigh)

<sup>13</sup> *Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan*; p. 46.

*Opportunities:*

- The West Mountain Ledges provide a stunning scenic vista to visitors approaching the Central Village Area from the east on Route 10.
- The West Mountain area provides important habitat for animal and plant life and is part of a wildlife corridor that stretches from the Fall River west to West and Wildcat Mountains and then on into Leyden.
- There are many passive recreational opportunities on West Mountain, such as hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.
- Six privately owned parcels in the Chapter 61B forest tax abatement program are located on or around West Mountain.<sup>14</sup> These temporarily protected parcels are located on Fox Hill Road east of the ledges and comprise 120 acres.<sup>15</sup>

*Issues:*

- None of the properties on the West Mountain ridgeline and ledges are permanently protected from development.
- The properties on West Mountain may be vulnerable to development pressures, particularly due to the scenic vistas and the fact that Town water is available nearby, extending part of the way up West Mountain Road.
- There is no formal trail along the West Mountain ridgeline and there are no signs to direct residents and visitors to existing trails and to interpret their significance.

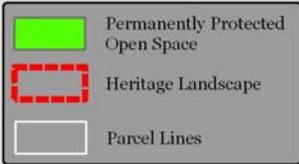
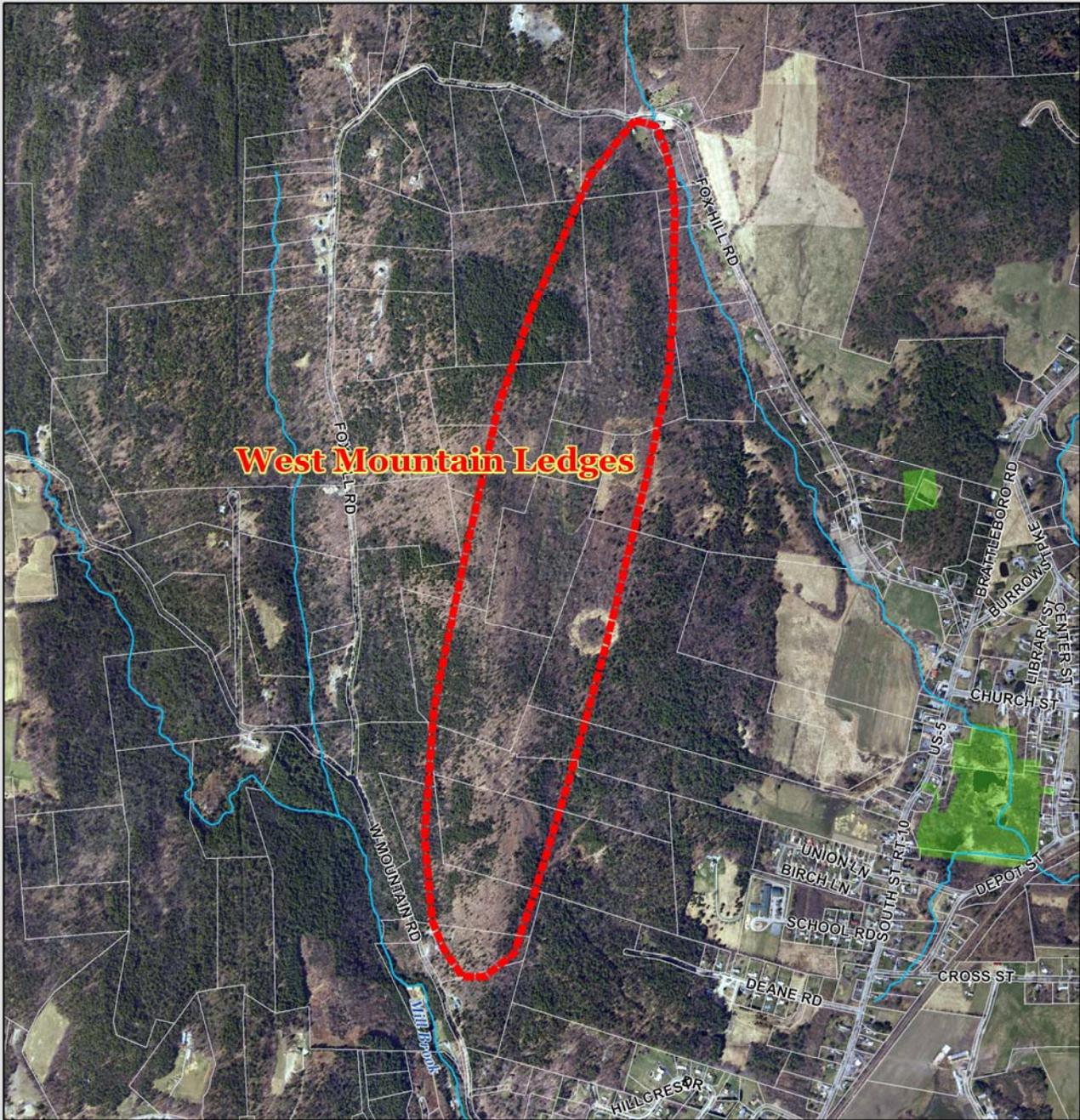
*Recommendations:*

1. The town should consider developing a Chapter 61 policy that prioritizes parcels on West Mountain currently enrolled in the Chapter 61 program, as also recommended above in the sections on Route 5 North and the Eden Trail Road. The Town could utilize its right-of-first-refusal option under Chapter 61 (or assign that right to a Land Trust) to purchase prioritized parcels on West Mountain if they become available through a conversion of use.
2. The Town could consider the adoption of a Scenic Vista Protection Bylaw that would establish additional design criteria for any proposals for new construction in the area of West Mountain ridgeline and ledges. Some towns refer to areas created by these bylaws

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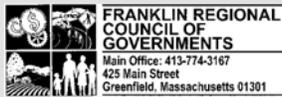
<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.; p. 58.



### West Mountain Ledges

Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts,  
Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
Franklin County



Map Sources:

Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.

Funding:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
Department of Conservation Resources

as Ridgeline or High Elevation Protection Districts or as Scenic Upland Overlay Districts. More information on these districts and bylaws is available in the EOEEA/MHC publication entitled *Preservation through Bylaws and Ordinances*.

3. The Town's Open Space Committee could work with willing landowners to develop recreational trails on West Mountain, potentially including snowmobile, cross-country skiing, and hiking trails. Efforts should be particularly focused on the West Mountain ridgeline and on creating guides, maps, and signs that direct visitors to trails and explain their history and importance as natural resources. One potential funding source is DCR's Recreational Trails Program, which provides grants for a variety of trail protection, construction, and stewardship projects. Another potential funding source recommended in Bernardston's *Draft Open Space and Recreation Plan* for acquisition of additional recreational resources is the Community Preservation Act (CPA).
4. Interested landowners could consider working with a local land trust (such as the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust or the Franklin Land Trust) to pursue a conservation easement to permanently protect their land. The Bernardston Open Space Committee could help provide resources and information.

### **Route 10/ Interstate 91 Corridor**

The Route 10/I-91 Corridor incorporates all of Route 10 from the Gill border in the east to the Country Corner Store in the Central Village Area and the area surrounding Interchange 28 on Interstate 91. It is a mixed use area that incorporates the Town's commercial and industrial districts, as well as residential and agricultural uses along its 2.75 miles of roadway. It includes the two Priority Development Sites designated in 2008 under the Chapter 43D Expedited Permitting



Country Oil on Route 10

program. One of the Town's four Water Supply Protection Areas is located just south of Route 10 in the area of Turners Falls and Deacon Parker Roads, near the Northfield and Gill borders in

the southeast corner of Town. There are a total of 17 commercial and industrial properties located within the Route 10/I-91 Corridor. These are listed in the table below in order from east to west as you travel along Route 10 from Gill to the Central Village Area.

**Table 1: Commercial/Industrial Properties in Route 10/I-91 Corridor**

Name of Business	Location
Bob Cook Excavating	7 Deacon Parker Rd.
Bernardston Self Storage	Route 10 & Deacon Parker Rd.
Country Oil	540 Northfield Rd.
Windmill Motel	497 Northfield Rd.
Carovail/Feed Commodities, Inc.	488 Northfield Rd.
Graves Concrete	303 Northfield Rd.
Crumpin Fox Golf Course & Pro Shop	Parmenter Rd.
Raymond Repair	Northfield Rd.
Mary Jean Zuttermeister, Chiropractor	108 Northfield Rd.
Whitney Rustic Cedar Fencing	111 Northfield Rd.
Fox Inn	71 Northfield Rd.
MassHighway Department Barn	I-91 interchange #28
Former Mohawk Plastics facility	23 Industrial Dr.
Streeter's Barbershop	1 Northfield Rd.
Former Streeter's Store/now Falltown Spirits	77 Church St.

**Source:** Economic Development Chapter of the Draft Bernardston Community Development Plan and FRCOG staff site survey.

In addition to these commercial and industrial properties, the Route 10/I-91 Corridor contains agricultural open spaces and historical sites, such as the open fields at the intersection with Purple Meadow Road, and the site of Lieutenant Ebenezer Sheldon's Fort, one of the early garrison houses used by the early settlers when threatened by Native attacks.



Historic Fort Marker on Route 10 at Purple Meadow Road



Purple Meadow from Route 10

The two areas designated as Priority Development Sites (PDS) by the Town of Bernardston in 2008 in cooperation with their owners are the most appropriate sites for commercial development in the Town. The Town's priorities for economic development include: maintaining the rural character of the town, diversifying the tax base to alleviate the burden of rising property taxes that most homeowners are facing, focusing new development along pre-existing commercial corridors, and redeveloping the former Mohawk Plastics site.

PDS #1 is located at the interchange where Route 10 meets I-91 and encompasses four developed properties, including the former Mohawk Plastics site and the barbershop and the former Streeter's Store, now the new location of Falltown Spirits. PDS #2 is located to the east on Route 10, between 31 and 107 Northfield Road. PDS #2 is made up primarily of undeveloped open space, including a popular turn-out and the large field where the Gas and Engine Show is held each May.



Priority Development Site #1 – Mohawk Plastics Building, view of site to the south



Priority Development Site #2 –View of site to the east, Route 10 to the left

As part of its participation in the State Chapter 43D expedited permitting program, Bernardston received grant funds to hire a consultant to evaluate wastewater treatment options in areas identified as appropriate for commercial and industrial development and recommend possible solutions to remedy the current situation. The consultant will examine the feasibility of constructing a system of sewers and a treatment plant to serve the Business and Industrial districts in Town, which are located along Rtes. 5/10, and the Central Village District, with a report expected in 2009. The consultant will also prepare a conceptual design and site plan of buildings and parking areas with preliminary square footage estimates for one development option encompassing one or more parcels of one Priority Development Site. The development option will be selected by the Steering Committee which was appointed by the Board of Selectmen and is overseeing the entire 43D project with community input.

*Opportunities:*

- The Route 10/I-91 Corridor is a mixed use area that incorporates the Town's commercial and industrial districts, as well as residential and agricultural uses and historic sites.
- The Route 10/I-91 Corridor includes the two Priority Development Sites designated in 2008 under the Chapter 43D Expedited Permitting program as appropriate areas for commercial and industrial development. There is currently an analysis being done as part of the Town's participation in the 43D program that will evaluate wastewater treatment options in areas identified as appropriate for commercial and industrial development and recommend possible solutions to remedy the current situation.
- There are a total of 17 commercial and industrial properties located within the Route 10/I-91 Corridor.
- Route 10 is a well-maintained road with wide shoulders.

*Issues:*

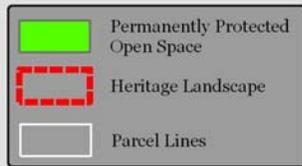
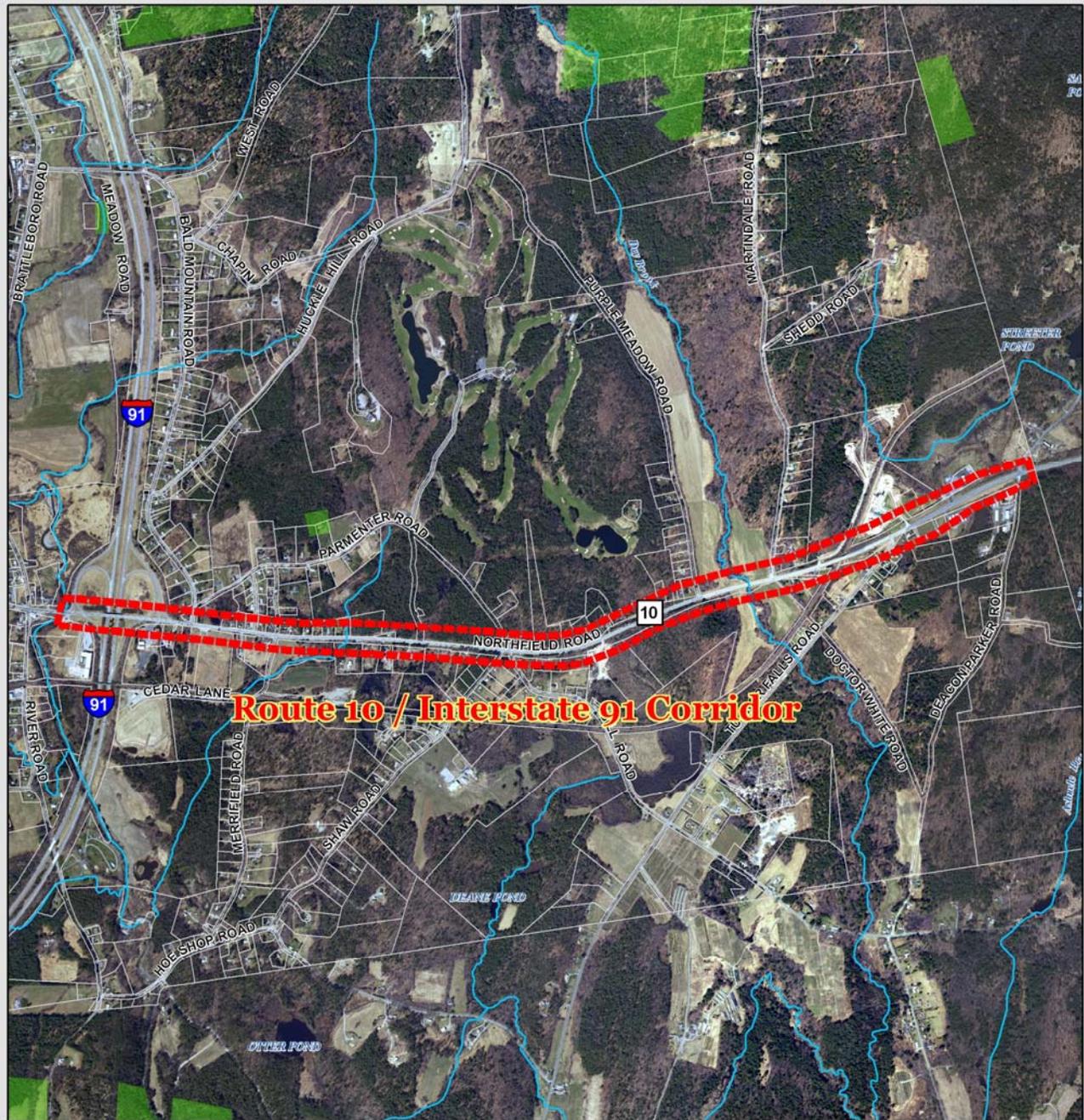
- Agricultural lands and historic sites within the Route 10/I-91 Corridor are not protected from development.
- One of the Town's four Water Supply Protection Areas is located just south of Route 10 in the southeast corner of Town, bordering on an Industrial District.
- The Town currently has no wastewater treatment infrastructure.
- Not all of the existing commercial and industrial uses within the Route 10/I-91 Corridor are screened with vegetation or other barriers to protect the view from the road or from abutter's properties. Some properties are better maintained than others in regard to their appearance.
- The Route 10/I-91 Corridor is a busy road with a lot of traffic, including pedestrians and bicyclists, raising concerns for public safety.
- The Priority Development sites are very visible as one travels along I-91.

*Recommendations:*

1. The Town could consider expanding the provisions of the Site Plan Review section of its Zoning Bylaws (§4400) as it relates to commercial and industrial properties in the Route 10/I-91 Corridor, with a particular view to strengthening the goals of minimizing the obstruction of scenic views and the visual intrusion of the use on abutters and travelers on Route 10 and I-91.
2. The Town could consider establishing a process of Design Review for the Route 10/I-91 Corridor, which is a non-regulatory process by an appointed Design Review Board that reviews the design of new construction and additions. Recommendations are made to the

Planning Board to help preserve appropriate building patterns and architectural styles, with the goal of maintaining the overall character of a given area.

3. The Town should consider working with interested landowners to permanently protect the Purple Meadow agricultural lands and historic sites within the Route 10/I-91 Corridor, through the APR program or a conservation restriction on the property.
4. The Town should review the results of the 43D wastewater treatment analysis and PDS conceptual design and evaluate its options in regard to the most efficient and cost-effective solutions for the location of commercial and industrial uses, as well as wastewater treatment infrastructure to serve the PDSs, the Central Village Area, and the Route 10/I-91 Corridor.
5. The Town should work with MassHighway as maintenance is planned for Route 10 in the future to ensure the safety of pedestrian and bicyclists sharing the road with motor vehicles.
6. The Town should continue its economic development planning efforts to determine suitable business and industrial uses to create jobs appropriate for Bernardston. Business uses that support local farms should be given priority.
7. The Town of Bernardston should consider adding a Planned Unit Development (PUD) bylaw to their zoning. A PUD is a unified development containing a mix of land uses such as commercial office space, retail stores, and possibly light industrial uses. PUDs could be allowed in the Industrial and Business Zoning Districts along the I-91/Route 10 corridor so that a parcel could be developed as a single project with a mix of uses based on a comprehensive site plan. A PUD requires a design and permitting process that encourages a less sprawling form of development to make more efficient use of land and utilities and reduce the length of streets and curb cuts needed. PUDs also support a pedestrian friendly environment where shoppers can park once and easily access all stores and services on the site.



## Route 10 & I-91 Corridor

Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts,  
Heritage Landscape Inventory Project,  
Franklin County



Map Sources:

Franklin Regional Council of Governments, 2009.  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Massachusetts Highway Department  
and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment, MassGIS.

Funding:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and the Environment  
Department of Conservation Resources

## **PART II: PLANNING FOR HERITAGE LANDSCAPES**

As our communities undergo rapid land use changes, heritage landscapes are particularly threatened because they are often taken for granted. There are a broad variety of resources that communities can call upon to protect these irreplaceable landscapes. See the Community Planning Checklist in this section for a review of the tools that Bernardston already has in place, any tools that are currently in process, as well as recommended actions for the future. The measures already in place for Bernardston provide a strong foundation for heritage landscape preservation, but additional measures that have been identified in Part I for Bernardston's Priority Heritage Landscapes in combination with the following text will aid in the development of a holistic preservation planning strategy. Terra Firma #7 - Taking Action: A Toolkit for Protecting Community Character (2009) should also be referred to for a more complete description of available planning tools and preservation measures as the Town moves forward in implementing recommended actions.

### **INVENTORY AND DOCUMENTATION**

#### *1. Massachusetts Historical Commission Records*

We cannot advocate for something until we clearly identify it, which in this case are the physical characteristics and historical development of the town's historic and archeological resources. The necessary first step is to record information about the resources at the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets is a statewide list that identifies significant historic resources throughout the Commonwealth. In order to be included in the inventory, a property must be documented on an MHC inventory form, which is then entered into the MHC database. This searchable database, known as the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), is now available online at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc>.

Current Listings: According to the MHC, Bernardston's inventory documents 94 cultural resources from the late 18th century to the 20th century including individual homes, civic buildings, and many properties associated with the historic Central Village Area. Several Heritage Landscapes identified by the community are on this list, including the Powers Institute Historic District and its surrounding buildings and sites including Cushman Park, Town Hall, The Unitarian Church, and the Arch Bridge. Many historic homes in Bernardston are also included in the MHC listing, including the David Ryther, Jr. House, built in 1790, (known as the Perry Farm) and the Jonathan and Ezra Connable Tavern (1789), both located on Route 5 North.

The David Ryther House (also known as the Gideon Ryther House) on Burrows Turnpike (1745) also has notable historical significance as the town's first post office.

**Recommendations:** The Town should update its MHC survey sheets describing each of the historic properties in Town, paying particular attention to properties located in the Central Village Area and along Route 5 North. Funds for this project could be sought from the Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program, a federally funded, reimbursable, 60/40 matching grant program that supports historic preservation planning activities in communities throughout the state.

### *2. National and State Register Listing*

The National Register of Historic Places is the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that have been determined significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. Listing brings a number of benefits including recognition, consideration when federally-or state-funded projects may impact the resource, eligibility for tax credits, and qualification for certain grant programs. Resources on the National Register are automatically added to the State Register of Historic Places.

**Current Listings:** The Powers Institute National Register Historic District was created in March 1994. It is a small district consisting of the Powers Institute, the Cushman Library, the Fire Station, Cushman Park, and Cushman Hall. (Cushman Hall, which provided affordable housing, was demolished due to structural deficiency in 2005.) The Congregational Unitarian Church has been a National Register Individual Property since March 1993.

**Recommended Listings:** The Bernardston Historical Commission should consider working with MHC to explore the potential for making the entire Central Village Area an expanded National or Local Historic District (LHD), or its designation as an Architectural Preservation District (APD). It might also consider the creation of an Arch Bridge National Historic District.

### *3. Heritage Landscape Inventory List from Local Identification Meeting*

Each town involved in the Connecticut River Valley Heritage Landscape Inventory held a local identification meeting to solicit input from a range of community members to identify potential heritage landscapes throughout the town. The lists were prioritized by the community, with help from the consultants, to create a list of six Priority areas, which were described in Part I of this report. The complete list of the 34 heritage landscapes identified at the meeting is included as Appendix A of this report and provides a sound resource list for future documentation activities and potential funding opportunities.

Bernardston's meeting was held on January 13, 2009 with 16 community members present. The historic, vernacular, ethnographic and/or designed landscapes of the town were grouped into the following categories:

- Agricultural
- Civic
- Institutional
- Open Space and Recreation
- Archaeological
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Residential
- Burial
- Historical
- Natural
- Transportation

## **TOWNWIDE PLANNING AND ZONING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES**

Detailed descriptions of planning tools and techniques can be found in the Department of Conservation and Recreation publication Terra Firma #7 - Taking Action: A Toolkit for Protecting Community Character (2009). This document includes the following sections: Municipal Roles in Landscape Preservation, Thinking in Context: Comprehensive and Open Space Planning; Engaging the Public; and Defending the Resources: Laws, Bylaws and Regulations. This document should be used in conjunction with this report, as a guide to acting on specific recommendations for the Priority Heritage Landscapes included in Part I.

This following Community Planning Checklist provides an overview of planning and zoning that currently exists within the Town of Bernardston, zoning changes that are currently underway, and recommendations for further changes that were included in this report and other planning documents.

**COMMUNITY PLANNING CHECKLIST**  
**TOWN OF BERNARDSTON**

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS	BUILDING BLOCK	NOTES
	Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)	
	Transit Oriented Development (TOD)	
✓	Mixed Use Village Districts	Center Village Residential District*
*	Planned Unit Development (PUD)	Route 10/ I-91 Corridor
	Adaptive Reuse and Infill Development	
	Tax Incentive Programs and Business Improvement Districts	
✓	Open Space Residential Development	Major Residential Development (\$4500)**
	Accessory Apartments	
	Inclusionary Zoning	
✓	Home Based Business Bylaw	(§2411)
✓	Brownfields Inventory	Franklin Regional Brownfields Site Assessment
✓	Brownfields Redevelopment Projects	Streeter Property—USTs removed in 2008
	Transfer of Development Rights	
✓	Agricultural Commissions	2008
✓	Right to Farm Bylaws	2008
	River Protection Overlay District	
*	Community Preservation Act	Could help fund improvements at Assembly Hall as well as other open space, farmland and historic preservation projects.
*	Scenic Upland Overlay District	West Mountain ridgeline and ledges
✓ <input type="checkbox"/>	Bike and Pedestrian Features	Sidewalk improvements Routes 5/10 in 2009; bike racks installed in 2006
	Traffic Calming Measures	
✓	Water Supply Protection District	Water Resource Protection District (§4300)
	Low Impact Development	
✓	Stormwater and Erosion Control Bylaw	Erosion Control (§3410)
	Stormwater Utilities	
✓	Commercial Site Plan Review	(§4400)***
*	Residential Site Plan Review	Route 5 North farmland protection
	Commercial Performance Standards	
	Urban Growth Boundaries / Limits of Sewer and Water Extensions	
	Green Building Standards	
	Municipally Owned Renewable Energy	
	Other Energy Efficiency Measures	
	Smart Growth Zoning Districts (Ch. 40R)	
	Intergovernmental Compact	
✓ *	Historic District (Local or National)	Powers Institute National Historic District (1994); recommended for Central Village Area, Arch Bridge Area, Route 5 North
	Demolition Delay Bylaw	
*	Scenic Road Bylaw	Consider designating Eden Trail Road a Scenic Road under M.G.L. Ch. 40, §15C
	Downtown Revitalization District	

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS	BUILDING BLOCK	NOTES
	Phased Growth Bylaw	
*	Back Lot Development with Open Space Set-Aside	Route 5 North and Eden Trail Road
✓	Flag Lots	Rear Lots (§2330)
✓	Flood Plain Overlay District	(§3430)
*	Other Overlay Districts	Agricultural Protection Overlay District on Route 5 North and Eden Trail Road
✓	Wetlands Protection Bylaw	(§4300)
*	Architectural Preservation District	Central Village Area; Route 5 North

- ✓ Successfully Implemented
- Under Consideration
- \* Should Consider Adopting

\* Uses allowed by right within the mixed-use CVR District include: one- and two-family dwellings and their accessory buildings; non-family accommodations; agricultural or forestry uses; conservation areas and public parks; religious purposes; educational uses; and farm stands. Uses allowed by special permit in this district include: multi-family dwellings not to exceed 4 units; major residential developments of more than four lots or more than 4 units; golf clubs or riding clubs; public utilities; non-commercial public service uses; hotels or motels; restaurants; service stations and auto repair shops; business or professional offices; retail stores and services; nursing homes; and funeral homes.

\*\*A Major Residential Development (MRD) is defined as the creation of more than 4 lots and is allowed by a Special Permit from the Planning Board upon review of a Development Plan and an Environmental Analysis. Flexible Development allowing waivers of dimensional requirements may be authorized within an MRD. Any proposed open land should be conveyed to the Town (or its ConComm) or covered by a recordable restriction enforceable by the Town. Up to a 30% bonus on the number of dwelling units allowed may be gained for creating affordable housing, conserving open space or preserving agricultural land.

\*\*\*Site Plan Review applies to all non-residential or non-agricultural construction.

**Town Planning Documents:**

- Draft Town of Bernardston Community Development Plan (to be completed in 2009)
- Bernardston Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2005)
- Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan (Draft 2008 by Conway School of Landscape Design)

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

### *Outreach, Education and Interpretation*

In order to create a community of advocates, we need to raise public awareness and broaden the base of support. This includes developing opportunities to learn about and celebrate the places and history of the town, as well as to care for them.

### *Collaboration*

Protecting community character, respecting history, and promoting smart growth are interrelated concerns that impact heritage landscapes and require collaboration across a broad spectrum of the community. This includes communication among town boards and departments, as well as public-private partnerships.

### *Technical Assistance*

Regulations and creative solutions for heritage landscapes are constantly changing and emerging. Public and private agencies offer technical assistance with the many issues to be addressed, including the State Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

### *Funding Opportunities*

Funding rarely comes from a single source, more often depending on collaborative underwriting by private, municipal, and regional sources. Each town also has a variety of funding sources that are locally-based and sometimes site-specific. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a potential source of funding for a variety of local projects.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report for Bernardston provides an initial preservation-planning document that identifies Priority Heritage Landscapes and discusses strategies for their long-term protection. Bernardston contains a rich diversity of heritage landscape types ranging from historic structures in the Central Village Area to scenic vistas and working farms on Eden Trail Road. These landscapes reflect the strong history and character of the community and are tangible pieces of the Bernardston story.

This report provides a starting point for preservation strategies but the heritage landscapes identified, especially the Priority Heritage Landscapes, may need additional research and documentation including preparation of additional MHC inventory forms and survey work. The information provided and further research will allow for better consensus building and the

support of the broader community in order to successfully implement recommendations for these landscapes. Ultimately, implementation of recommendations will likely require a collaboration of local boards and commissions, regional and state agencies and non-profit entities.

Many in Bernardston are already moving forward with a variety of initiatives and projects that advance the celebration and preservation of its heritage landscapes that are enumerated above. Distribution of this Reconnaissance Report to various municipal boards and commissions involved in making land use decisions will assist Bernardston with an overall strategy for the preservation of its community's character. The breadth of action steps outlined in this document will require a cooperative effort and a variety of local groups to take the lead on implementation. Some recommendations for Heritage Landscape preservation within this report are customized for particular Priority Heritage Landscapes and others address townwide planning and preservation techniques that will strengthen the efforts that the Town has already accomplished. This report should be used in conjunction with Terra Firma #7 - Taking Action: A Toolkit for Protecting Community Character (2009), which provides more detail about specific tools available.

The top three recommendations from this report that the town of Bernardston should focus on in the near future are:

- The Bernardston Historical Commission should consider working with MHC to explore the potential for making the entire Central Village Area an expanded National or Local Historic District (LHD), or an Architectural Preservation District (APD).
- The Town could protect the scenic quality of the area along Route 5 North by establishing a Agricultural Protection Overlay District that would require clustering of residential properties on smaller lots to preserve farmland.
- The Town could consider the adoption of a Scenic Vista Protection Bylaw that would establish additional design criteria for any proposals for new construction in the area of West Mountain ridgeline and ledges.

Dissemination of the community's heritage landscape resources to the general public is also an important tool for increasing awareness and support for protection of these landscapes. This report provides an important step for Bernardston's preservation planning program and can provide the foundation for future historic preservation, conservation and recreation planning activities. The commitment of the citizens of Bernardston to their heritage is apparent in the historic landscape character and fabric that makes Bernardston the unique cultural, historic, and agricultural resource that it is.

## RESOURCES:

*Bernardston Town Website.* <http://www.town.bernardston.ma.us/>

*Community Preservation Act.* <http://www.communitypreservation.org/index.cfm>

*Department of Housing and Community Development.*

<http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eheadagencylanding&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Economic+Analysis&L2=Executive+Office+of+Housing+and+Economic+Development&L3=Department+of+Housing+and+Community+Development&sid=Ehed>

*Draft Bernardston Open Space and Recreation Plan.* Conway School of Landscape Design.

*Franklin County Rural Historic Landscape Preservation Plan Report.* Franklin County Commission, 1992.

*Heritage Landscape Inventory Program.* Department of Conservation and Recreation.

<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/Inventoryprog.htm>

*Reading the Land: Massachusetts Heritage Landscapes: A Guide to Identification and Protection.* Department of Conservation and Recreation, 2004.

*Translations: The First Chapter of the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program.* Department of Conservation and Recreation, 2008.

*Terra Firma: Putting Historic Preservation on Solid Ground, Taking Action: A Toolkit for Protection Community Character.* Department of Conservation and Recreation, 2008.

*Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS).*

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc>

*Massachusetts Department of Agriculture.* <http://www.mass.gov/agr/programs/index.htm>

*Massachusetts Historical Commission Bernardston Reconnaissance Survey,* 1982.

*Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund.*

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcmppf/mppfidx.htm>

*Our Family Farms.* <http://www.ourfamilyfarms.com/index.html>

*Town of Bernardston Draft Community Development Plan* (currently being drafted with assistance from FRCOG).

## APPENDIX A: BERNARDSTON HERITAGE LANDSCAPES

Note: Landscapes marked with an asterisk (\*) have been designated “Priority Heritage Landscapes” by the town.

LANDSCAPE NAME	NOTES
<b>Agricultural</b>	
<i>*Route 5 North “Scenic Byway”</i>	Pastoral views of agricultural fields and barns; also historic homes and fort marker; also Transportation
<i>*Eden Trail Road</i>	Located in southwest corner of Town; Especially nice from the Duprey Farm to Town Line; barns and fields
<i>Newton Farm/Purington Farm</i>	Bald Mountain Road
<i>Peila Farm</i>	Cross Street
<i>Purple Meadow</i>	Agricultural fields and historic fort marker
<b>Cemetery</b>	
<i>Hessian Soldiers Cemetery</i>	Eden Trail; private
<i>Old Cemetery</i>	Also known as Burke Flat Cemetery; just visible from Route 5
<b>Civic</b>	
<i>*Church Street/Central Village Area</i>	Arch Bridge on Falls River to Cushman Park
<i>*Cushman Library</i>	
<i>*Town Hall</i>	
<i>*Churches</i>	
<i>*Cushman Park</i>	
<i>*Powers Institute</i>	Originally built as a school; currently houses Council on Aging on bottom floor and Historical Society Museum upstairs (museum open seasonally).
<i>*Town Hall Assembly Hall</i>	Needs for an elevator, etc. for handicap accessibility
<b>Commercial</b>	
<i>*Route 10 / I-91 Corridor</i>	Includes 2 Priority Development Sites; also Industrial
<b>Historical</b>	
<i>Historic Museum</i>	Upstairs at the Powers Institute
<i>1704 Indian Raid on Deerfield–Stop-off point</i>	Route 5 North
<i>Site of First Meeting House</i>	Huckle Hill; marker only, no other evidence remains
<i>Powers Institute Historic District</i>	Located in Central Village Area. Established 3-18-93, includes the Powers Institute, Cushman Library, Cushman Park, Fire Station, and Cushman Hall (since

	demolished)
<b>Natural Resources</b>	
<i>Couch Brook Gorge</i>	
<i>Bear's Den</i>	Keets Brook Road
<i>*West Mountain Ledges</i>	Scenic ridgelines, wildlife corridor, agricultural areas at base of mountain
<i>Falls River Corridor</i>	
<i>Satan's Kingdom Wildlife Management Area</i>	Northeast corner of Town; (also in Northfield); also Open Space/Recreational
<b>Open Space/Recreational</b>	
<i>Pratt Field</i>	South Street; Bernardston Recreation Area
<i>Charity Farm Lot</i>	Bald Mountain Road
<i>Cushman Park</i>	Town center; walking paths, wetland
<i>Crumpin Fox Golf Course</i>	Privately owned
<i>Snowmobile Trails</i>	Purple Meadow
<i>Silver Lake</i>	Between Cushman Library and the Powers Institute
<i>Kiwanis Park</i>	Brattleboro Road
<i>North Bernardston Recreation Area and Lake</i>	Eastern side of East Mountain
<i>Perry's Pasture</i>	Fox Hill Road; also Agricultural
<b>Residential</b>	
<i>North Bernardston Historic Homes</i>	Route 5 north
<b>Transportation</b>	
<i>Arch Bridge</i>	Railroad bridge over Falls River on River Street in Central Village
<i>South Street</i>	Routes 5/10; main highway prior to I-91; includes two one-room schoolhouses and historic homes
<i>Stagecoach Inns</i>	Route 5/Brattleboro Road; three inns: New England House (destroyed by fire), Chase House (also known as Eck Inn, Connable Tavern
<i>Town Roads Surveyed</i>	Turnpike and Lampblack out of Greenfield; River Street in Bernardston; Turners Falls Road (former ferry)
<i>Franklin County Bikeway</i>	Expand along Route 5